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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: WHAT IF FOREIGN MINISTER TARASYUK GOES?

REF: A. KIEV 3919

1B. KIEV 3862
1C. KIEV 1036

Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: With rumors rife that Foreign Minister Tarasyuk will leave the Cabinet -- either by resigning with his Our Ukraine colleagues or being voted out of his job by the Rada, pundits tout current Presidential Secretariat Deputy Chief of Staff for foreign policy Oleksandr Chaliy as the leading candidate to be Tarasyuk's successor. Chaliy was former First Deputy Foreign Minister when Yanukovych was previously prime minister and at that time was a strong supporter of NATO and EU membership for Ukraine. Before his appointment to the Presidential Secretariat, however, Chaliy received public attention in May 2006 for his advocacy of Ukraine's non-aligned status. During an October 5 meeting with Ambassador, Chaliy portrayed himself as loyally protecting President Yushchenko's foreign policy prerogatives. And in recent public comments, Chaliy has asserted that Ukrainian foreign policy would remain unchanged, regardless of the composition of the Ukrainian cabinet.

12. (C) Comment: Other than personal style, the most pronounced policy difference between Chaliy and Tarasyuk appears to lie in their respective approaches to NATO membership -- although some argue that Chaliy's apparent change of heart on NATO may have only been a temporary tactical political move. This may not matter, since, in the near term, there may not be much of a need for MFA political heavy-lifting on NATO now that the possibility of obtaining a MAP appears to be receding. The burden for bringing Ukraine closer to NATO will remain with the Ministry of Defense, which continues to carry out defense reforms under the Ukraine-NATO Intensified Dialogue. As foreign minister, Chaliy might influence the MFA's management of the NATO information campaign, however. (Chairman of the State TV and Radio Committee Eduard Prutnik claimed to Ambassador October 12 that MFA has the lead and the ball is in MFA's court.) A more likely immediate result of a Tarasyuk departure is expected to be the removal of some of his key deputies from their current positions. End summary/comment.

Tarasyuk's Final Bow?

13. (C) If Our Ukraine (OU) negotiations with Party of Regions break down and President Yushchenko agrees to allow the OU-affiliated "orange" cabinet ministers to resign, the fate of the remaining three "orange" ministers -- Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko (formerly a socialist now loyal only to Yushchenko), as well as Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko, and Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk nominated by Yushchenko according to the constitution -- remains unclear. However, aside from OU's political machinations about joining

the ruling coalition or not, FM Tarasyuk appears to be in the Party of Regions' sights as the orange minister most likely to be removed from his position by a simple majority vote in parliament (Rada).

¶4. (C) During an October 4 meeting with EUR DAS David Kramer and Ambassador, PM Yanukovych singled out Tarasyuk for criticism. The PM said that he regretted the previous day's decision by the political council of Tarasyuk's People's Movement of Ukraine (Rukh) party to go into opposition even as the Our Ukraine bloc was continuing its negotiations. This had led to pressure in the Rada to seek Tarasyuk's resignation. Yanukovych described Tarasyuk's position as an irresponsible one for a sitting minister to take, but he said he would not let Party of Regions bring up the issue in the Rada until he had approved the move. Yanukovych's comments suggested that he did link Tarasyuk's appointment to President Yushchenko and that he would treat the Presidential appointments separately from the other OU ministers.

Chaliy Next?

¶5. (SBU) Nevertheless, rumors are circulating that Tarasyuk is on his way out and that Deputy Presidential Chief of Staff Oleksandr Chaliy is being positioned to replace Tarasyuk. According to this reasoning, Chaliy sits midway between the Yushchenko and Yanukovych camps in terms of his background and views and is thus acceptable to both. (Embassy Note. Chaliy worked most recently in the Industrial Union of Donbas with newly appointed NSDC Secretary Vitaly Hayduk and, in July, then-Yanukovych foreign policy adviser Leonid Kozhara listed Chaliy as one of four possible foreign minister candidates acceptable to Party of Regions.)

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¶6. (C) Tarasyuk, however, seems to be carrying on at MFA as if nothing has changed. MFA Arms Control Department Director Belashov told us that Tarasyuk had chaired an October 9 meeting of department directors and gave no indication that he was preparing to leave the ministry and chaired the meeting in a business-as-usual manner. While difficult to read the tea leaves (for example, Tarasyuk and Hrytsenko continued on in the Yanukovych cabinet even as both gave us clear indications that they were on their way out before the government was formed), Tarasyuk could find it increasingly less tenable to serve in the government should his party and political allies move into opposition. At the end of the day, Tarasyuk (and Hrytsenko) have made it clear that he serves at the pleasure of Yushchenko -- implying that a voluntary departure from the Foreign Ministry would only take place at Yushchenko's instruction.

Tarasyuk's Record

¶7. (C) Tarasyuk has been a staunch advocate of European and Euro-Atlantic integration and a stronger defender of the Orange Revolution and Orange Revolution values. Under his leadership, the Foreign Ministry has attempted to exercise regional leadership for the first time. Ukraine took the potentially painful step of reinstating a customs agreement with Moldova that created additional pressure on the Transnistrian authorities to mend its relationship with Chisinau. Ukraine also took the leadership to launch the "Community of Democratic Choice" and to work to establish GUAM as a regional group with standing as an international organization. Tarasyuk's strong views and forthright comments, however, have alienated the Russian government in particular, and his grating style has created enemies among political parties and figures, particularly those who support closer ties with Russia.

¶8. (C) On the practical side, Tarasyuk's departure could lead to warmer relations between Ukraine and Russia and perhaps

also between Ukraine and Belarus. The Kremlin has long resisted an official visit by President Putin to Kyiv, but this might happen under a different foreign minister. This improvement is likely to be temporary, however, since Ukraine's differences with its two neighbors result from fundamental differences in their strategic interests. Tension over the stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet is likely to continue, since the Ukrainian constitution does not allow the permanent stationing of foreign forces on Ukraine after the current agreement expires in 2017 but Russia has made no preparations for the Fleet's withdrawal. Russia will also continue to base its approach to natural gas supply arrangements on its own strategic interests rather than the personality of the foreign minister. Russia will continue to want to exert influence on the neighbors with which it was once joined in the Soviet Union, and Ukraine is likely to continue resisting this pressure, no matter what government or foreign minister is in power.

¶9. (C) The buzz at lower levels at MFA suggests that a number of career diplomats are anticipating a change in leadership and expect some of those closest to Tarasyuk would be quickly removed. First Territorial Department Director Valentyn Adomaytis, for example, is curiously hostile to Russia for someone who has primary responsibility in MFA for the Ukraine-Russia relationship. Another potential big loss for us would be the departure of Deputy Foreign Minister Andriy Veselovsky, who is also special negotiator for Transnistria issues and closely linked to Tarasyuk. Various MFA officials complain about Tarasyuk's authoritarian style of leadership and micromanagement tendencies. Some foreign diplomats agree that Tarasyuk is sometimes a difficult person with whom to deal. At an October 5 E-PINE dinner, Tarasyuk went out of his way to bash Yanukovych in public remarks. Europeans have tried to get Tarasyuk to restrain himself, to no avail.

Chaliy's Lobbying

¶10. (C) In an October 5 meeting with Ambassador, Chaliy gave no overt indication that he was preparing to become foreign minister, other than to obliquely criticize Tarasyuk for not being able to work with Yanukovych. On the other hand, as he noted, Chaliy himself had been in MFA when Yanukovych was previously prime minister and was familiar with Yanukovych's style and approach. Chaliy touted himself as a man of compromise and referred to his varied background as a lawyer by training and with experience as both a diplomat and businessman. He also worked to convey the impression that he was loyally supporting President Yushchenko's foreign policy prerogatives. He said he was doing this by preparing presidential directives on key foreign policy issues so as to avoid the confusion surrounding purely oral interactions, as

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had happened before Yanukovych's trip to Brussels.

Chaliy's Record

¶11. (C) On substance, however, Chaliy's track record is mixed. The influential Dzerkalo Tyzhnya weekly in its September 23 issue noted the irony of the "pro-NATO and pro-EU" President Yushchenko's appointment of Chaliy to the Presidential Secretariat. In May 2006, Chaliy joined with other prominent figures in a move to promote Ukraine's non-aligned status in accordance with a December 1991 referendum. While First Deputy Foreign Minister, however, Chaliy had been a strong advocate of EU and NATO membership and left MFA in 2003 after publicly criticizing Ukraine's decision to join the Single Economic Space with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. According to Vadym Doroshenko, who moved from MFA to the Industrial Union of Donbas with Chaliy, Chaliy's advocacy of neutrality might have been temporary and tactical. (While he speaks English well, Chaliy is less fluent than Tarasyuk, speaking with a stronger accent and

sometimes using fairly stilted language.)

¶12. (C) Dzerkalo Tyzhnya also opined that, due to his varied background, Chaliy would be able to synthesize interesting ideas from different fields. As an example of "an interesting idea," OSCE Mission in Moldova Head Lou O'Neill was aghast to hear Chaliy, apparently seriously, suggest that Ukraine should pressure Transnistria to negotiate seriously by imposing an economic blockade of the region. To be fair, Chaliy also strongly condemned the September 17 Transnistria "independence" referendum in an appearance on national UT-1 television two days later and characterized Transnistria as Ukraine's top national security threat.

¶13. (U) Interfax quoted Chaliy October 11 as saying, "In my view, there will be no changes in the foreign policy course even if some changes occur to the composition of the Ukrainian cabinet." To internet news website Obozravatel, Chaliy said he personally continued to support Ukrainian neutrality, but, as a public servant, he would support Ukrainian law. (Note: The June 19, 2003, Law on the Fundamental Principles of Ukraine's National Security states that EU and NATO membership are a Ukrainian strategic goal.)

¶14. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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